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Resources

A “stranding” occurs when a marine mammal is either:

- Dead, whether found on the beach or floating in the water;
- Alive, on a beach, but unable to return to the water;
- Alive, on a beach, and in need of apparent medical attention; or
- Alive, in the water, and unable to return to its natural habitat without assistance.

Additional Information

For additional details, please refer to the *2018 Marine Mammal Strandings Overview: United States*.

All images were taken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Photo (top): A stranded spinner dolphin is brought to the University of Hawaii Health and Stranding Laboratory for necropsy. Photo: University of Hawaii Health and Stranding Laboratory.



2018 Marine Mammal Strandings Overview: Pacific Islands Region

The U.S. Marine Mammal Stranding Response Network is comprised of more than 120 organizations that provide first response capabilities for cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) and pinnipeds (seals, and sea lions) that are sick, injured, in distress, in peril, or dead. These responses are authorized and overseen by NOAA Fisheries’ Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

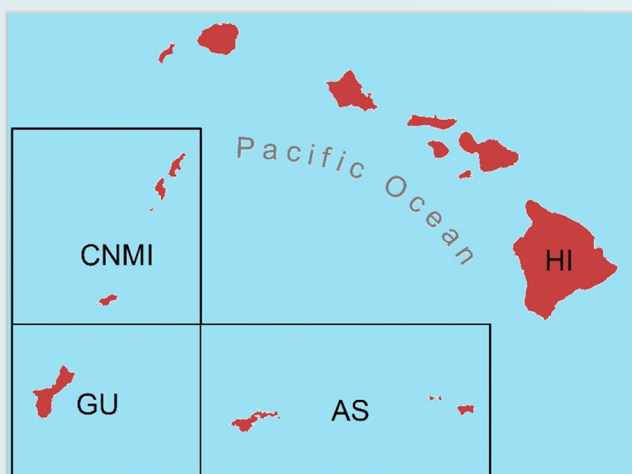


Figure PIR-1: NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Region (PIR) including Hawaii (HI), American Samoa (AS), Guam (GU) and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Not pictured: the Pacific Remote Island Areas of Kingman Reef; Howland, Baker, Jarvis, and Wake Islands; and Johnston and Palmyra Atolls.

Pacific Islands Region

The NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Region encompasses approximately 1,494 miles¹ of coastline around the Main Hawaiian Islands, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands (Figure PIR-1). The region covers areas frequented by beachgoers (i.e., Main Hawaiian Islands), but also contains some very remote areas (i.e., Northwestern Hawaiian Islands). The 36 confirmed marine mammal strandings in the Pacific Islands Region in 2018 is similar to its 12-year (2006–2017) average ($n=45 \pm 12$).

¹ <https://coast.noaa.gov/data/docs/states/shorelines.pdf>

What Types of Marine Mammals Strand in the Pacific Islands Region?

At least 18 different species of marine mammals can be found in the waters of Hawaii, with the majority of stranding reports involving Hawaiian monk seals (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*), which are the only species of pinniped endemic to the Hawaiian archipelago (Figure PIR-2 and Table PIR-1). The Hawaiian monk seal is one of the most endangered species of seal in the world with a population of around 1,400 individuals (about 300 in the Main Hawaiian Islands and 1,100 in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands). In 2018, all pinniped strandings reported in the NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Region were Hawaiian monk seals (pinnipeds from the mainland U.S. have been known to strand in Hawaii but such events are rare). Small cetacean species such as the common bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), spinner dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*), striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*), melon-headed whale (*Peponocephala electra*), and pygmy sperm whale (*Kogia breviceps*) also stranded in 2018. The first confirmed stranding of a Fraser's dolphin (*Lagenodelphis hosei*) in Hawaii in more than 12 years was also documented. Large whale species such as humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), sperm (*Physeter macrocephalus*), fin (*Balaenoptera physalus*), and blue (*Balaenoptera musculus*) whales frequent the jurisdictional waters of the Pacific Islands Region but large whale strandings are relatively rare in the region, with only one large whale ("unidentified whale") stranding documented in 2018 (Table PIR-1 and Figure PIR-3).

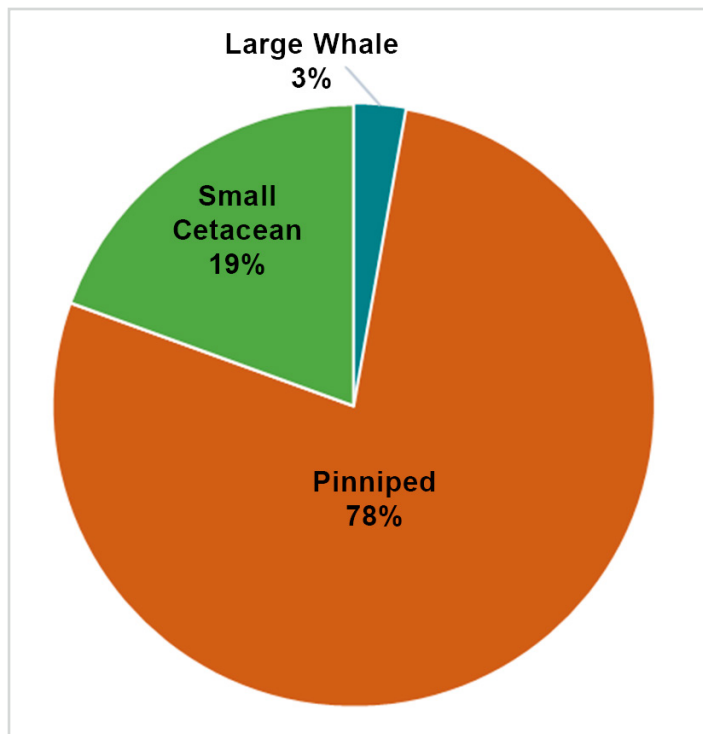


Figure PIR-2: Pacific Islands Region marine mammal strandings, 2018 (n=36).

Table PIR-1: The most frequently stranded marine mammal species in the Pacific Islands Region, 2018.

Species	Confirmed Stranding Reports 2018	12-Year Average \pm Standard Deviation ² (2006-2017)
Hawaiian Monk Seal	28	21 \pm 10
Bottlenose Dolphin	1	2 \pm 1
Fraser's Dolphin	1	N/A
Spinner Dolphin	1	4 \pm 2
Striped Dolphin	1	2 \pm 1
Melon-headed Whale	1	2 \pm 1
Pygmy Sperm Whale	1	2 \pm 1
Unidentified Dolphin	1	N/A
Unidentified Whale	1	N/A

2 A standard deviation is a measure used to quantify the amount of variation within a set of values.

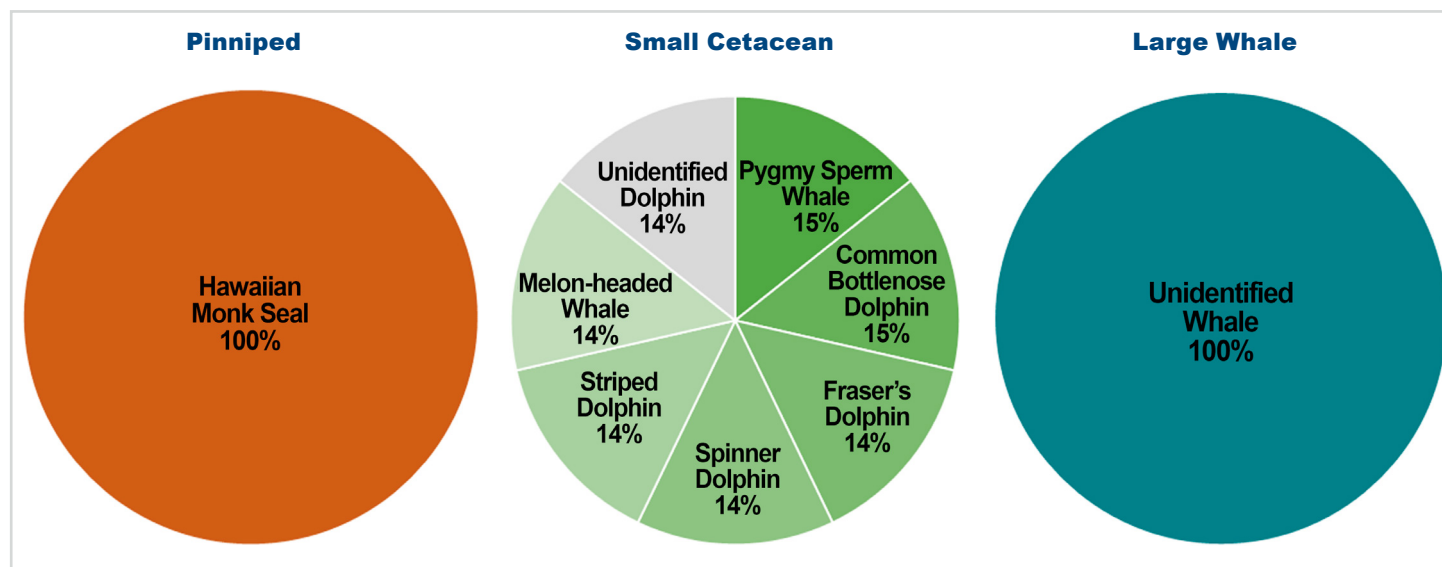


Figure PIR-3: Pacific Islands Region marine mammal strandings, by species, 2018 (n=36). Pinniped (n=28), small cetacean (n=7), and large whale (n=1).

Species in the Spotlight



Hawaiian Monk Seal (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*)

Hawaiian monk seals are a critically endangered species and one of NOAA Fisheries' "Species in the Spotlight." Found throughout the Hawaiian archipelago, they are commonly seen in the Main Hawaiian Islands, Northwest Hawaiian Islands, and sometimes as far away as Johnston Atoll, nearly 1,000 miles southwest of Hawaii. Following a decline of the Hawaiian monk seal population over several decades, the population has grown at an average rate of about 2 percent per year since 2013, thanks to dedicated management and recovery efforts. Despite this progress, Hawaiian monk seals still face many threats including: fisheries interactions; entanglement in marine debris or derelict fishing gear; intentional harm by humans (including harassment); disease and contaminants, particularly toxoplasmosis; and male seal aggression toward females. **In 2018, 28 Hawaiian monk seals were reported stranded to the National Stranding Network.** For more information on the Species in the Spotlight initiative, please visit:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/endangered-species-conservation/species-spotlight-action-plan-accomplishments>

When Did Marine Mammals in the Pacific Islands Region Strand in 2018?

Hawaiian monk seals stranded year-round in the Pacific Islands Region. The small spike of pinniped strandings in May (Figure PIR-4) is reflective of research cruises conducted around the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands during that period, when seals suffering from malnutrition were rescued and brought into rehabilitation facilities. The Stranding Network also responded to cetacean strandings throughout the year, although fewer in number.

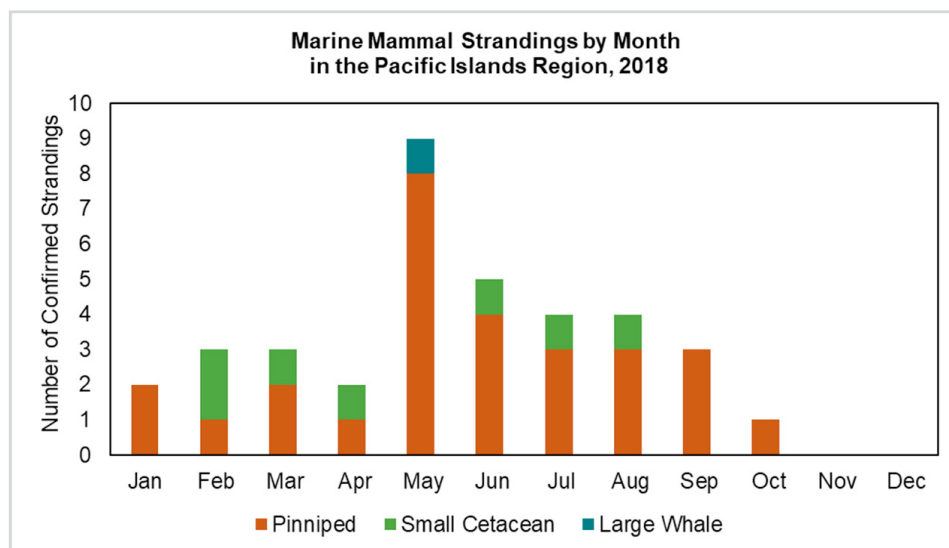


Figure PIR-4: Seasonality of marine mammal strandings in the Pacific Islands Region, 2018.

Are Marine Mammals in the Pacific Islands Region Stranding Alive or Dead?

In 2018, 75 percent of pinnipeds and 13 percent of cetaceans reported stranded to the Pacific Islands Region Marine Mammal Response Network involved live animals (Figure PIR-5). Responses to Hawaiian monk seals often included animals accidentally hooked by fishing gear. Interactions with fishing gear pose a serious danger to the seals, especially if the hooks are ingested. Based on the recommendations of authorized veterinarians or professionals, some seals were transported to Ke Kai Ola, which is the hospital and rehabilitation facility dedicated to Hawaiian monk seals administered by The Marine Mammal Center. All of the animals treated at Ke Kai Ola on the Big Island or at the NOAA lab on Oahu in 2018 (n=6) were released back into the islands and regions from where they were initially rescued. The network tries to gather as much information as they can from examining carcasses and live-stranded animals to better understand the species, as well as any population threats or pressures they may be facing.

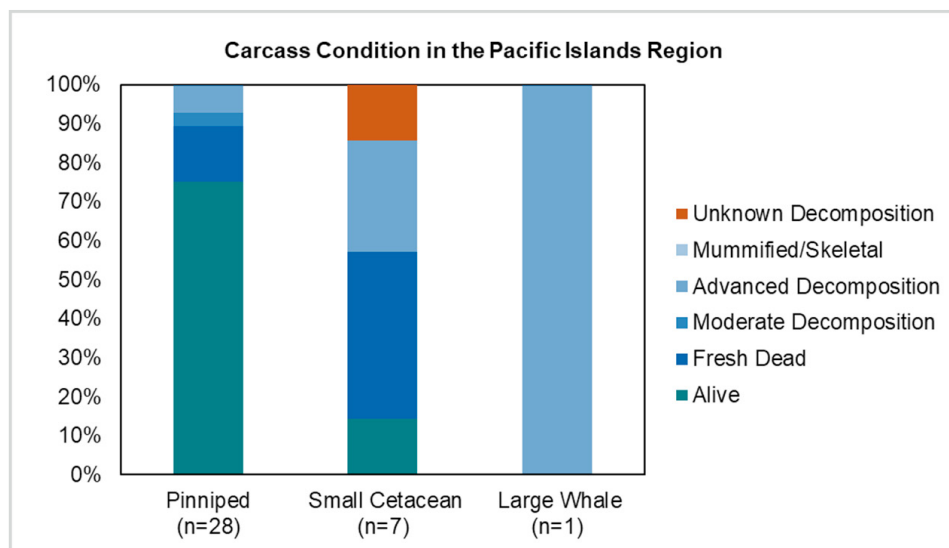


Figure PIR-5: The condition of stranded marine mammals on initial observation in the Pacific Islands Region, 2018.



Photo (left): The first confirmed stranding of a Fraser's dolphin in Hawaiian waters in more than 12 years. After investigating the cause of death, researchers discovered a novel strain of cetacean morbillivirus, a marine mammal disease that commonly affects the lungs and brain. Photo: Cindy Kern/Maui Marine Mammal Response Network.

What Types of Unusual Mortality Events Were Occurring in the Pacific Islands Region?

Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs) in the Pacific Islands Region are relatively rare, and there were no new or open UME investigations underway in 2018. More information about UMEs is available at:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-unusual-mortality-events>

Hawaiian Monk Seal Conservation at Ke Kai Ola

Since opening in 2014, The Marine Mammal Center's "Ke Kai Ola" hospital dedicated to monk seal rescue and rehabilitation has provided critical long-term care to several sick or injured Hawaiian monk seals. Most of the seals brought to Ke Kai Ola are rescued in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Many of the seals admitted to the hospital are malnourished, and several are treated for parasites and diseases such as toxoplasmosis. Following rehabilitation, Hawaiian monk seals are fitted with satellite tags to monitor their movements and behaviors post-release.

The MMHSRP has supported Ke Kai Ola through the Prescott Grant process, and continues to collaborate with veterinary staff, researchers, and volunteers contributing to Hawaiian monk seal conservation.



Hawaiian monk seal "RH38" hauls out of her pool at Ke Kai Ola. Photo: Heidi Nikolai/The Marine Mammal Center.

What Can Members of the Public Do?



An endangered Hawaiian monk seal is photographed from a remote field camp on French Frigate Shoals in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Photo: Keelan Barcina.



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Pacific Island Regional 24/7 Hotline

The Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program relies on reports of stranded marine mammals by the public. If you come across a stranded marine mammal, please report it to your Pacific Island regional 24/7 hotline.

Hotline: (888) 256-9840

Report a Stranding

When reporting a stranded marine mammal, please include the following information:

- Date
- Location of stranding (including latitude and longitude)
- Number of animals
- Condition of the animal (alive or dead)
- Species (if known)

Photos or videos (from a safe and legal distance of 100 yards, unless greater restrictions apply) can also provide valuable information to Network responders. Only trained and permitted responders should approach or pick up a stranded marine mammal. You can also download the Dolphin & Whale 911 Stranding App in the Apple Store to help report a stranding.

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Get Involved

The National Stranding Network relies on government, private, and public support to conduct its vital work to save animals in distress and understand causes of injuries and mortalities.

You can make a difference by contacting your local Stranding Network (list available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/report>) to see how you can get involved.

Only confirmed stranding activities involving species under the jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries (cetaceans and pinnipeds, except walrus) are included in this report. All data were obtained, analyzed, and validated from the NOAA Fisheries National Marine Mammal Stranding Database. Any duplicate events, and entries of entangled large whales, were removed from the following analyses. All data and information described within this report are correct as of September 22, 2020 (when the data query of the National Stranding Database was performed). All photographs were taken under Stranding Agreement, Section 109(h) authority, or NMFS research permits.